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MAN'S SPAN OF LIFE.

BY LANGDON KAIN, M. D.

It is a curious fact that authorities do not agree, within a hundred years, as to the utmost limit of human life, though the question is important enough to be positively determined. A comparatively recent writer, the late Sir George Lewis, did not hesitate to affirm that it is not possible for any person to reach the age of 110; that no one, or hardly any one, ever lives to be 100. Mr. Thom and the late Professor Owen agreed that no one has ever been proved to be more than 103 years and a few months old. Haller, Bailey, Flourens, and other early writers, give accounts of persons of the reputed age of 185 years, and in one instance of 200 years.

Popular opinion, and even expert or medical opinion, is not disposed to accept the limit of Professor Owen. Every little while some eminent medical man takes people to task for dying short of a century of life. A short time before his death the late Sir Benjamin Richardson asserted that seven out of every ten sound and reasonable people ought to live to be 110 years old, and would do so if they took care of themselves. The late Mr. Proctor, the popular writer on astronomy, reports a New York physician as saying that in all his experience he had known but one man to die a natural death, his idea of that being the memorable collapse of the wonderful "One Hoss Shay."

The simple and obvious explanation of the wide differences of opinion as to how long it is possible for any human being to withstand the destructive influence of time is that observers and writers are of different degrees of credulity. It is hard to say why no serious investigation of living instances is made, instead of basing opinion on doubtful cases so long past as to make inquiry futile. Louis Carnaro, St. Mongah, and the others whose

cases are so invariably cited by writers on this subject, have been cruelly overworked, notwithstanding the power of endurance of the typical centenarian. There is no reason to think the percentage of old people is lower to-day than in the time of Haller, or that people do not live as long. On the contrary, Macaulay found that the annual death-rate of London in the latter half of the seventeenth century was one twenty-third of the entire population ; while at the time he wrote it had been reduced to one-fortieth, clearly by the increased material prosperity and the more human ways of life. That it has been further reduced since then, largely by the development of sanitary science, is a matter of positive knowledge. Since the effect of advanced civilization was to lower the death-rate, it must also have increased the percentage of persons of great age. It may be affirmed, once for all, that the power to resist disease which lowers the death-rate is also the power that prolongs life.

Another common source of error is the census return. There are persons who look upon everything official as necessarily accurate, and though they might be skeptical as to the personal statement of a reputed centenarian, if his age is reported in the census they accept it as virtually proved. They do not consider that, after all, it is the mere *ipse dixit* of the person himself, which the census-taker makes no attempt to verify. It is for this reason that Professor Owen and other careful investigators reject the census reports. The census invariably shows that wherever the intelligence and prosperity of the people are highest, the centenarians are fewest. In a Russian census a significant fact was discovered by Flourens. While the returns included 1,063 centenarians in the Empire, there was not a single one in St. Petersburg and Moscow, the new and the old capitals, the most civilized parts of Russia and the most accessible to serious investigation. The inference was that the intelligent and prosperous people have more accurate sources of information and are more trustworthy in their statements of age than the ignorant.

A striking instance of the misleading effect of the census is recent. A German statistician concludes that civilization, or rather education, is fatal to long life. His basis is the fact already mentioned, that in countries where education is general the centenarians are fewer than in countries where ignorance and poverty are the rule. England, with its 28,000,000 people, has

only 146 centenarians, while Ireland, with only 5,000,000 people, has 578. Germany, with 50,000,000 people, has only 78 centenarians, while Norway, with but 2,000,000 people, has 230, and the Balkan Peninsula, with a population of 10,000,000, has 5,542. Switzerland has not a single centenarian in her 2,000,000 population. Spain, with 18,000,000 people, has 410 centenarians. Of the alleged centenarians of Bulgaria and Servia, 290 are from 106 to 115 years old, 123 are from 115 to 125, eighteen are from 125 to 135, and there are three between the ages of 135 and 140. A summary shows that England, Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden, where education is general among the people, having an aggregate population of 84,000,000, have only 234 centenarians. Ireland, Norway, Spain, and the Balkan States, where the reverse is the case, having an aggregate population of only 35,000,000, have 6,760 centenarians.

The German statistician takes occasion to state, as a result of his inquiries, that the oldest man is not, as has been said, a Russian of 130 years, not a retired Russian cabman, Kustrim by name, of 140 years, but one Bruno Cotrim, a negro born in Africa, and now living at Rio de Janeiro, of 150 years. Though he poses as a man "bristling up with small facts, prurient with dates, a braggadocio of exactness," it is significant that he is not surprised that the last figure in the age of each of these candidates should be a cipher, which is against the laws of chance; and that the age of the second should be just ten years more than that of the youngest, and the age of the oldest just ten years more than that of the second, which is also in violation of the laws of chance. He sees nothing strange in the similarity of the names Kustrim and Cotrim, though here again the laws of chance are brutally outraged.

The inference which the German statistician draws from the census returns is contradicted by every list of persons compiled to show the effect of occupation on longevity. Men of thought are most often at the head for length of years. He forgets, too, that even in Germany, though reeking with culture, there are always many thousands who do not partake of the deadly fruit of the tree of knowledge, but are healthfully illiterate. Yet they rarely escape the common fate, dying before their hundredth year. Adam was warned against the fatal consequences of knowledge, but everything else points to the inference, not that edu-

cation and comfort are favorable to early death, but to that already noted—the lack of accurate information as to their own ages and sometimes the mendacity of the ignorant classes. There is the same cause of vanity in being phenomenally old as in being phenomenally anything else.

Whether the excesses of the rich and the well-to-do are so grave as to make their chances of long-living inferior to those of the illiterate, and especially of paupers, has been often and fully discussed. Most observers will agree with the conclusion of Sir George Lewis, and, later, of Mr. Tollemache, that centenarians will generally be proportionally more numerous in the higher social strata than in the lower ; and that the apparent reversal of this by census returns and other centenarian records is due to the ignorance of the illiterate poor, especially paupers, to their love of the marvelous and to their self-interest.

Reputed centenarians in this country whose ages exceed a hundred by more than three or four years have no documentary or satisfactory evidence to offer. The oldest, of whose age there is little room for doubt, though the documentary proof is not complete, was Mrs. Emily Robins Talcott, of the age of 105 years and 4 months. She was born near Hartford, Conn., where she spent most of her life, and died of bronchitis April 20, 1896. Her memory, health, and eyesight were good, and she took care of her own room. She had shaken hands with Washington and Lafayette, and had seen Fulton's first steamboat ascend the Hudson. She said her great-grandmother was 107, and that her mother was within a few weeks of 100.

Hiram Lester, who was alleged to be the oldest man in the United States, was a pauper who died in a North Carolina almshouse in the summer of 1896 at the reputed age of 128 years. His only evidence was the statement of his father, who died in the same almshouse many years ago at the age of 115 years, it was said. Noah Raby, also a pauper, an inmate of the almshouse at Piscatawa, near New Brunswick, N. J., celebrated what he said was his 125th birthday on April 1, 1897. He was born in Gates County, North Carolina, his father being a full-blooded Indian named Andrew Bass. He says he was discharged from the man-of-war "Brandywine" eighty-four years ago, but has lost his discharge papers ; that he heard Washington make an angry public address at Norfolk ; that he began smoking when he was five

years old, and has continued to smoke ever since, and has always been a drinker of liquors. It is on his unsupported statement that the people of the neighborhood regard him with local pride. Mrs. Margaret Bowen died near Chicopee Falls, near Springfield, Massachusetts, in May, 1896, at the reputed age of 121 years. She was born in County Clare, Ireland, and came to this country in 1865. Her husband, still alive, is now 78 years old. James Oney, who died in Knott County, Kentucky, in April, 1896, said he was 115 years old, though there are no records in the case. He was born at Mount Vernon, Virginia, near the home of the man who could not tell a lie, had twenty-three children, three of whom were born blind. Of his 178 descendants, thirteen were born blind. He died virtually a pauper, and was fond of whiskey toddy, getting "jolly" to the end. His oldest son, blind, is now living in Knott County at the age of 90, which age is also unsupported by evidence. The father had seen Washington often. Louis Darwin and his wife, French Canadians, living at Saint Paul, Canada, aged respectively 107 and 101 years, have been married 81 years, according to their own account. "Jack" Casar, a negro, who was a slave in New Jersey, the body servant of Mr. John Quackenbush, died at Ridgewood, in that State, December 19, 1896, at the reputed age of 106 years. Mrs. Yetta Gerber died in March, 1897, at 52 Suffolk street, New York City, at the age, it is said, of 106 years. She was born in Poland, and distinctly remembered she was 21 years old when Napoleon passed through the village in which she lived on his way to Russia, and again on his return. A few days before her death she entertained visitors by cracking a filbert with her teeth, of which she had never lost one. Joseph Field, there is good reason to believe, was 104 years and 6 months old when he died, April 1, 1897, near Red Bank, N. J., where he had always lived. He was a farmer with a fortune of half a million. He had remained a bachelor until he was 75 years old, when he married a young woman who bore him three daughters. He was able to walk about until a few months before his death. He had always used whiskey in moderation. Mrs. Goings, who professed to be 109 years old, died at Indianapolis in February, 1896. She said her father was 111 at the time of his death and her mother 106. William Taylor, of Augusta County, Va., died at the reputed age of 105 years and 2 months, at Baltimore, where he had gone in search of work as

a painter. Mrs. Lorena Huntley, of Moira, Franklin County, N. Y., who was born at Peru, in the same State, died in December, 1896, at the age of 104 years. There is an early family Bible record of her birth.

Hester Jackson, colored, was an inmate of St. Michael's Hospital, Newark, April 16, 1897, which she said was her 104th birthday. She was born a slave at Rahway, N. J., and distinctly remembered that her master, Elston Marsh, was an officer in the war of 1812, and also that she had seen Washington. Jane Brown, also colored, was an inmate of the Home for Aged Colored People in Brooklyn in the summer of 1896, when she celebrated her 103d birthday. She was born a slave in New Jersey, spent much of her life in Philadelphia, and saw Washington. Mrs. Angelique Galipeau, a neighbor of the centenarian Darwins, is said to be 102. She sews without glasses, and walks a mile to church. Her father is said to have lived 110 years. John McKenzie died at Jersey City in December, 1896, at the age of 102. He was called "the best-natured man in the world," and it was to his amiability that his long living was due in the opinion of his friends. Mrs. Martha Squires, of Nelsonville, a small settlement near Peekskill, New York, celebrated her 102d birthday October 11, 1896. She has lived there for seventy years, and her neighbors are confident she is as old as she claims to be. Her oldest child is now 85. Mrs. Clarissa Stebbins Lawrence, of Marlboro, near Keene, New Hampshire, was 100 on January 25, 1896. Mrs. Lydia Turner, of West Concord, New Hampshire, was 101 December 8, 1896. She is in good health, and has "all her faculties." Mrs. Hannah Bartow was 101 May 1, 1896. She lives at New Brunswick, New Jersey, and is the great-grandmother of a child which weighed less than five pounds at nine months of age. This old lady does not wear glasses and keeps a small candy store. Mrs. Cox, of Holderness, New Hampshire, died of whooping cough in 1896 at the age of 101. Elisha Boulden Glenn, of Newark, N. J., was 100 years and 4 months old November 7, 1896. He walked to the polls the same week. Emanuel Schwab, of East Fifty-sixth street, New York, received each guest at the door on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of his birth, December 14, 1896. He sang a song and read a poem which he had composed the same week. He walks two miles every morning and smokes a long German pipe. John

Lockhart, aged 100, walked into Parkersburg, Pa., in October, 1896, from his home on Lee Creek, fifteen miles away. While in town he danced a jig.

It is interesting, and it may be profitable, to note some of the cases of extreme age to be found in the older records. Not all of the centenarians were paragons of all the virtues. Thomas Whittington, for example, who lived to be 104, was an habitual drunkard, drinking only London gin, of which he consumed from a pint to a pint and a half daily. Philip Laroque went to bed drunk at least two nights in the week until he was 100. At 92 he cut four new teeth. John de la Somet, 130 years old, was an inveterate smoker. Several famous old people were extremely addicted to matrimony. Owen Duffy, who lived to be 122, married his third wife at 116, "by whom he had a son and a daughter." Francis Hongo, a Venetian, was five times married and was the father of forty-nine children. At the age of 100 his white hair fell out and a new crop of the original color came in. At the age of 112 he had two new teeth. Margaret Krasiowna, a Pole, married her third husband at ninety-four. "She bore to him two sons and a daughter, as proved by the parish register." Margaret McDowal, 106 years old, married and survived thirteen husbands. Among the recorded centenarians are two dwarfs, Mary Jones, 100 years, who was 2 feet 8 inches in height and terribly deformed, and Elspeth Watson, 115 years old, who was 2 feet 9 inches in height. Among the most agile were Mrs. Barrett, who, at the age of 116, climbed a ladder to repair the roof of her cottage; and Elizabeth Alexander, who was particular about her dress at 108, and was used to a daily walk of two miles. Several had peculiar habits. Mrs. Lewson, 117 years old, never washed her face for fear of taking cold, but greased it with hog's lard. John Hussey, 116 years, drank only balm tea as a beverage. John Wilson, the same age, supped always off roasted turnips. Judith Banister, 100, lived entirely on biscuit, bread, and apples during the last sixty years of her life. Old Lord Scarsdale and Lord Combermere, both of whom lived to a ripe age, thought the wearing of a tight belt habitually about the waist had much to do with their excellent health. Macklin, the centenarian actor, abandoned regular hours of eating in the last sixty-seven years of his life, taking food when he was hungry. Two interesting married couples are reported. Mr. and Mrs. Cot-

terell, aged respectively 120 and 115 years, were married 98 years and "never had a quarrel." They died within a few hours of each other. John Rovin, a Hungarian, and his wife, aged 172 and 164 years, lived together 148 years. At the time of the husband's death the youngest son was 116 years old.

The case of Louis Carnaro, first reported by Flourens, is famous for its services to the cause of temperance. He published several books on the benefits of an abstemious life. Born with a sickly constitution and living a dissipated life until he was 40, when he was near dying, he became so moderate in his diet that at last the yolk of an egg sufficed for two meals. It is uncertain whether he lived to be only 99, or whether he reached the age of 104, though he was reputed to be much older. Kentigern, or Saint Mongah or Mongo, is also an evidence of the value of temperance. According to Spottswood his age was 185. One Lawrence, 140 years old, was another temperate man. The Rev. Peter Alley is said by Bailey to have been 111 years old and to have conducted services regularly until a few weeks before his last illness. He was the father of thirty-three children. Other very old persons were Thomas Winslow, aged 146 years; James Bowels, aged 152 years; Margaret Foster, 136 years, and her daughter, 104 years; Zartan, a Hungarian and a proper neighbor of the Rovins, above-mentioned, 189 years; and Joseph Budge, 107 years, who cut new teeth just before his death.

It may be well to explain here the phenomenon of new teeth so often mentioned in the case of centenarians. Professor Owen investigated several instances and found that the gums had receded, as they tend to do in old age, until the stumps of old teeth were exposed and were mistaken for new teeth.

The absence of trustworthy vital statistics is distressing to all who pursue the subject of longevity. The suggestion of Mr. Galton is worth attention, that each family keep a comprehensive record of important facts.

LANGDON KAIN.